

CUTLER COAST UNIT

1. Character of the Landbase

The 12,234-acre Cutler Coast Unit is located along Route 191, primarily in the Town of Cutler. The northwest portion of the Unit is within the Town of Whiting. The original 2,174-acre parcel was acquired from The Conservation Fund in 1989 through the Land for Maine's Future program. A management plan for this parcel was then adopted in 1993. A subsequent 5-acre parcel was acquired in 1995, which provided parking for the trailhead adjacent to Route 191. In 1997, the Conservation Fund, along with its managing partner the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, donated to the state a 9,485-acre parcel on the north side of Route 191, with the Bureau purchasing an additional 570 acres, to complete the 10,055-acre acquisition. This newer parcel is primarily forested, and contains an important complex of grasslands and heaths designated as an Ecological Reserve. Much of the area is well suited for a variety of recreational trail uses.

The Unit's most striking features are the steep, jagged bedrock cliffs jutting into the Atlantic Ocean. Standing on the shore, visitors are dwarfed by the cliffs, which present views of basalt columns, overhangs and massive igneous intrusions lying at unusual angles. Sheltered within the craggy shoreline are the eastern portions of Almore Cove, and all of Long Point and Black Point Coves, each ringed with cobbled beaches. Between Almore Cove and Long Point is Fairy Head, a popular remote camping area. A "blowhole" or "spouting horn" can be found seen on the shoreline under certain surf conditions, where wave pressure forces water through the roof of a sea cave and into the air.



From early summer to early fall, Humpback, Northern Right, Finback, and Minke whales can occasionally be seen from the cliffs. The first three are federally and state-listed endangered species.

Most of the 2,179 acres along the coastal side are located on a plateau raised to 220 feet above sea level. The property is drained by Schooner Brook and Black Point Brook, both bordered by extensive wetland areas. Although there is little elevation change within the upland portion of this parcel, the terrain is nonetheless diverse.

2. Resources and Management Issues

NATURAL AND GEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The majority of the Cutler Coast Unit is forested upland (70%), while the remainder is a combination of non-forested wetland (16%), non-forested upland (8%), and forested wetland (6%). The total acreage includes approximately 5,216 acres of designated in 2001 as Ecological Reserve on both the north and Bold Coast parcels, this plan includes a management recommendation to modify those acres to more accurately reflect the important community types identified prior its designation in 2001.

The Bold Coast parcel includes four and a half miles of rocky coastline. The wind, fog, and cool summer temperatures along the Downeast coast create a short growing season, providing a unique habitat for vegetation. Because of this cool climatic influence, some natural community types are similar in structure and composition to sub-alpine areas found inland or boreal areas much further to the north. Consequently, the Unit has a number of exemplary natural communities. The Open Headland community type is found on the exposed bedrock cliffs, where hearty boreal plants, such as black crowberry and creeping juniper, grow in narrow fissures in the rock or other areas where small amounts of organic matter accumulate. The Maritime Spruce-Fir Forest natural community, also found close to the coast, is characterized by balsam fir, heart-leaved paper birch, and mountain ash. The poor growing conditions result in few trees greater than 12 inches in diameter. With shallow, organic soils on bedrock, “tip-ups” are common, and dead wood is prevalent. In addition, balsam woolly adelgid is causing fir mortality, and contributing to an abundance of blow downs and decaying wood, which in turn create habitat for insects and birds.

Upland forests on the remainder of the Unit, particularly those in the northern parcel, have a lengthy history of fire and heavy harvesting, resulting in a dominance of balsam fir and early-successional hardwoods, including poplar and birch. Five outstanding Bluejoint Meadows on the Unit form dense mats of grassy vegetation, which have been periodically “control burned,” most recently in April of 2004. The largest of these grasslands, encompassing over 1,300 acres, lies along the upper reaches of East Stream in the northern portion of the Unit. Many believe that periodic burning is needed to maintain the grassland, which is viewed as providing important habitat for wildlife (as recommended in 1993 management plan). However, recent research from the University of Maine (Dieffenbacher-Krall 1996) suggests that these periodic burns may not be mimicking a natural fire regime and, in fact, may not be necessary for maintaining the quality of the grassland community.

A number of small bogs on the Unit provide additional openings in the forest cover, including two Huckleberry Crowberry bogs. One of these harbors the rare shrub, northern comandra, and the rare crowberry blue butterfly, which feeds exclusively on black crowberry. One exemplary Sheep Laurel Dwarf Shrub Bog occurs in the north portion of the Unit. The Natural Resource Inventory for the Unit was updated in 2005 and includes a revision of the original 1992 inventory work completed for the Bold Coast parcel.

The original 5,216-acre Ecological Reserve designation in 2001 included portions of the north and Bold Coast parcels. After review of this area by staff and the Maine Natural Areas Program, it was recommended that the Reserve be modified to more accurately reflect the important community types identified prior to its designation. This modification includes (pictured in green) adding the remaining 288 acres on the southwest end of the Bold Coast parcel and 57-acre area along Route 191, and a 172-acre area on the northeast end of the north parcel. A 512-acre area on the north parcel, where it abuts the East Stream Road (pictured in red), will be undesignated. This modification enlarges the maritime spruce-fir within the Reserve inventory, better consolidates Reserve management on the Bold Coast parcel, and makes available an area better suited for active forest and recreational trail management. This modification will result in an increase of 5 acres to the current Ecological Reserve inventory on the Unit



- Modifications are needed to the Ecological Reserve boundary to better reflect the important community types that led to its designation.
- The importance of burning the grasslands south of Route 191 is not entirely known. Further research of all of the grasslands needs to be done to verify if they are of natural origin.
- Commercial management/maintenance of the blueberry barrens could impact the surrounding ecological reserve and East Stream; of concern is the use of fertilizers and burning necessary to enhance blueberry production over time.
- The decaying forest structure within the coastal portion of the ecological reserve could potentially impact recreational uses of the parcel.

Nomenclature. The town was named for Joseph Cutler, a proprietor from Newburyport, Massachusetts. Ackley Stream, on the southwest corner of the upland parcel, was named for Oliver Ackley who owned land surrounding Ackley Pond. Bother Brook, located in this same area, was so named because it was a “bother” for woodsman to cross. Bagley Brook, which crosses the Whiting town line into Cutler at the blueberry barren, is named for a man who was a nearby resident in 1881. Compass Rock, just east of the blueberry barren, is so named because of

a large rock with navigational marks carved by hunters. Cocoa Mountain is said to be named after a group of hunters who took cocoa wine with them on a hunting trip, with some getting lost on the mountain. French Ridge on the north parcel is named for a man named French who once lived there, Harmon Heath for the Harmon family, and Holmes Cove for a local lobsterman. Local lore suggests that Fairy Head should be spelled as "Ferry Head." because ferry boats navigating the Grand Manan Channel used the prominent headland as a landmark to help find their way into Cutler Harbor.

Cultural Resources. The coastline running from Long Point to Sandy Point and encompassing Long Point Cove is known to contain significant Native American archaeological resources, including stone tools excavated in 1984.



Summary of Historic-Cultural Management Issues

- The management and public use of Long Point Cove along the Bold Coast Trail needs to be in consideration of the likely presence of archeological resources known to occur in this area.

FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES

While there is a diversity of habitat types on the Unit, low site productivity on the coastal portion -- due primarily to thin soils and fire -- has resulted in fair to poor habitat conditions for most species. The unique grasslands on the Unit contain ideal habitat for certain species of uncommon or rare bird species such as merlin, short-eared owl, yellow rail, and sedge wren. The sedge wren is a rare species; it is a very small brown bird with a short, slim bill and a slim, cocked tail. It is typically found in grassy wetlands; though due to its small size and secretive nature, it is often difficult to find. The yellow rail is also rare, and is a shy, sparrow-sized, yellow-brown bird with dark brown stripes down its back. Its habitat preferences are freshwater marshes and wet meadows. Several years ago, a yellow rail was sighted just east of the coastal portion of the Unit, but has not been recently verified.

The broad forest types are approximately 60% softwood, 30% mixedwood, and 10% hardwood. The hardwoods are generally small, of poor quality, and are frequently comprised of noncommercial species such as pin cherry and mountain ash, the fruits of which are an important wildlife food.



Most wildlife species indigenous to this part of the state are found on the Unit, with habitat conditions being favorable for bobcat. Snowshoe hare is its primary prey, although their populations are naturally cyclical. Extensive patches of young softwood, the preferred habitat for snowshoe hare, occur throughout the Unit. The hare population does appear on the increase, which should enhance the bobcat population, provided their other habitat requirements for escape cover, travel, and den nesting are met.

There are bogs (heaths), wetlands, and old beaver flowages scattered throughout the property, connected by sluggish streams (East Stream is pictured) that support a brook trout fishery in the spring. Nearly all of these areas contain well-defined game trails.

Several important wetland types, with the potential to harbor unusual or rare species, occur on the property. Peatland areas have pitcher plants and other plants typical of bog areas. There are also extensive stream-wide emergent meadows on the property.

Extensive grassland barrens occur on both the north and south sides of the Unit; with most being within the designated Ecological Reserves. These barrens are dominated by blue-joint grass, flat-topped aster, alder, and meadowsweet. Brambles are found on the upland sites in areas lacking wetland hydrology and soils. In the absence of fire, the grasslands may revert to alder dominated shrub communities, and eventually to birch and mixed forests. Natural succession of the grasslands to shrub or birch and mixed forest communities would reduce the diversity of wildlife habitat on the property.

The coastal cliff community along the rocky headland is a unique type within the range of mainland properties managed by the Bureau, providing ideal nesting habitat for seabirds along the ledges. Ravens have been observed nesting on the ledges near Holmes Cove. The coastal bluffs are also a good location to observe migrating whales during the fall.

Summary of Wildlife Management Issues

- Future decisions regarding management and burning of the grassland areas will have a direct impact on other wildlife habitat values on the Unit.
- Encouraging periodic regeneration of softwood to maintain early successional habitat will be important in retaining hares, bobcat, and other species that depend on that habitat.

RECREATION AND VISUAL RESOURCES

Considering its relatively small size, the coastal portion of the Unit imparts a sense of solitude in a relatively undisturbed surrounding. The remote nature of the Bold Coast portion is further enhanced by the difficulty in landing boats, except during calm sea conditions. The diverse terrain and topography, stunted vegetation, and small bogs and barrens also make the coastal portion of the Unit aesthetically unique.



The character of the northern parcel is primarily forested except for the barrens and wetland areas. Much of the area is well suited for a variety of recreational trail uses. There are 19.5 miles of shared use roads and designated ATV trails within this parcel, many of which are maintained by the East Stream Trail Riders ATV Club, including portions of the East Stream and Cocoa Mountain Roads. A portion of this system passes through the Ecological Reserve, with a bridge recently constructed through a small section of grassland within the Reserve.

The northern parcel also contains opportunities for other trail uses, including horseback riding and mountain biking, and efforts will be made to manage for these uses should there be continued interest.

The coastal portion of the Unit is accessible via a trailhead and 12-car parking lot located on Route 191, offering hiking trips of 5 to 10 miles, along with the popular “coast and back” 3 mile hike. The parking area commonly fills, with overflow parking occurring along Route 191. Three primitive campsites are located along the coastline approximately four to five miles from the trailhead, with several sites located a short distance inland. These campsites, along with the trails are heavily used, with notable compaction occurring in various places. There may be some limited opportunity to increase the number of campsites to address this. No further expansion of the hiking trail system on the coastal parcel has been contemplated.

One area of concern is the increasing risk of blowdowns from heavy tree mortality, which could cause temporary closure of certain trail segments on the coastal parcel. This situation will need to be continually monitored, although preventive management will be limited due to its location within the Ecological Reserve.

Much of the recreation management on the coastal portion of the Unit is accomplished through a partnership with the Cobscook Trails Coalition; a coalition of public and private conservation landowners (The Nature Conservancy, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maine Dept. Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Quoddy Regional Land Trust, area businesses, and the Bureau of Parks and Lands). The Coalition was founded to provide nature tourism opportunities in the Cobscook Bay region. Quoddy Regional Land Trust manages the partnership and employs a trail steward to assist with visitor information and routine trail maintenance. Bureau staff provide assistance on larger scale maintenance projects.

Visual Considerations. The coastline, with its cliffs, coves, pebble and cobble beaches and crashing waves, along with expansive views of the ocean, is the primary scenic amenity on the Unit. The inland terrain, with its diverse topography and vegetation, is also aesthetically unique and important. Several bald knolls accessed by the hiking trail system offer views of the surrounding heath, bog, and forest. Views from Route 191 include expansive wetlands, grasslands, and blueberry barrens against a backdrop of low hills.

Summary of Recreation Management Issues

- The trails and campsites to and along the Bold Coast receive heavy use throughout the hiking season. On fair weather weekends the parking lot fills, with overflow parking taking place along Route 191.
- Heavy tree mortality on the coastal parcel could cause temporary closure of certain trail segments.
- Heavy public use has resulted in a moderate amounts of compaction (areas impacted beyond the established treadway) along the coastal trail, and at overlook and campsite locations.
- A designated 2-mile ATV connector trail passes through the Ecological Reserve on the parcel, its use predating Reserve designation.

TIMBER AND RENEWABLE RESOURCES

While the Cutler Unit has only modest changes in elevation, those changes tend to be very steep, especially seaward of Route 191, where no timber management has occurred since acquisition of the property. The sites and climate here are growth limiting, to the point that only half as many tree species were tallied during a 1999 inventory as were tallied at either the Rocky Lake or Donnell Pond Units. The forest attributes are found in combination with the grassland complex and presence of maritime spruce-fir. As a result, the only acres suitable for timber management occur on the northern parcel. The Unit and surrounding area received considerable budworm damage and salvage harvesting in the 1980's, yet numerous mid-aged stands (between saplings and mature forest) can be found - more so than anywhere in the regional plan area. Portions of the Unit have also been a popular for "tipping" - the collecting of fir boughs for Christmas wreaths and other decorations. Permits for this activity have been issued in the past.

A 512-acre area of the Ecological Reserve within the northern parcel, where it abuts the East Stream Road, was identified as having minimal ecological value, and would benefit from periodic treatment. In the past, a 288-acre area on the coastal parcel, where it abuts the Ecological Reserve, had been considered for timber management, but location and access issues have rendered it impractical for this use.

Stand Type Characteristics:

Softwood types are mainly found on the drier sites that are either sand/gravel or thin to ledge, though there is some occurrence in wetland areas. The dry site softwoods are spruce-fir, with most being pole timber size, or trees mainly 5-10" in diameter. The wet sites have very poor cedar with occasional spruce-fir. Some areas contain fir that is mature and ready to harvest, while the pole timber would benefit from thinning.

Mixedwood types occupy about two-thirds of the forested area, and was converted to mixedwood by past preferential cutting of spruce and fir. Like the Rocky Lake Unit, much of this type is on land better suited to softwoods. The hardwood component contains low quality red maple and white birch, some of which is well formed though the low fertility will limit their sawlog potential. The softwood portion of these stands is mainly spruce-fir, and is generally of much better quality than the hardwoods. There is less opportunity to do stand improvements here as overall volumes are the lowest of any Bureau-managed property in the state.

Hardwood types cover only 4% of this Unit, and are either aspen/white birch or red maple/white birch, all of limited quality. There is no Northern Hardwood type; in fact, two of the three key species in that type, namely sugar maple and beech, are nearly absent. Management of the hardwood here may be limited to ensuring that that it be retained for diversity.

Summary of Timber Management Issues

- Income from timber harvesting will be limited during the Plan period due to stand improvement needs throughout the Unit.
- A 512-acre area adjacent to the East Stream Road, currently part of the Ecological Reserve, has limited ecological value, and would benefit from active management; 288-acres on the west portion of the coastal parcel has not been actively managed due to location and access issues.

TRANSPORTATION AND ADMINSTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

Leases and Agreements

- 1) The Bureau administers one residential camplot lease on the Unit, located off the Cocoa Mountain Road. The camp, within the Ecological Reserve, existed at the time the north parcel was acquired by the Bureau.
- 2) A commercial lease for the management of approximately 85 acres of blueberry barren at the end of the East Stream Road on the north parcel is a continuation of a lease granted by the previous landowner. The lease stipulates organic methods for the management and harvesting of blueberries in order to protect water quality, and the resource values in the surrounding Ecological Reserve area.

Public Use and Management Roads, Gates and Road Control

No public use roads are designated on the Unit. A parking lot/trailhead is located on Route 191 on the coastal parcel which provides foot access to the Bold Coast trail system. The Cocoa Mountain and East Stream Roads are unimproved gravel roads, providing limited vehicle access to interior portions of the north parcel. There is a gate on private lands on the west side of the coastal parcel; use of this gate is limited to administrative uses only.

Fire Control

The Bureau's Integrated Resource Policy states "Wildfires occurring on or spreading to Bureau lands will be controlled." (pages 12-17). The Bureau will continue to coordinate with the Maine Forest Service in planning for the prevention and control of forest fires on the lands that it manages. Such efforts will be undertaken on a regional basis, to ensure Bureau staff can respond adequately and quickly to fire emergencies.

Controlled burns are an activity that takes place on the grasslands within the Ecological Reserves and on the blueberry barren on the north parcel. The Maine Forest Service will be consulted and will provide guidance on this activity.

3. Resource Allocations and Management Recommendations

SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS (see map CC-1)

Special Protection as a Dominant Use. The entire coastal portion, with the exception of the trailhead and parking area along Route 191, has been designated an Ecological Reserve. A significant portion of the inland parcel, primarily between the East Stream Road and the Cocoa Mountain Road, has also been designated as an Ecological Reserve. In addition to these areas, two additional areas on the inland parcel containing bluejoint meadows and a maritime spruce-fir-larch forest have also been allocated as Special Protection.

The Long Cove area along the coastline has been allocated as an important historic-cultural resource as a result of its prior use by Native Americans.

Secondary Uses Within Special Protection Areas. Most of the Ecological Reserve within the coastal portion is suitable for Non-mechanized Backcountry Recreation activities such as hiking and primitive camping, which are allowed secondary uses within this designation.

An approved ATV club trail on the north parcel is partially within the Ecological Reserve. The trail existed prior to designation of the reserve, and is located mostly on old roads. An ATV bridge to protect a grassland area was constructed in 2003.

Special Protection Management Recommendations

- Modify the Ecological Reserve boundary to include all of the coastal parcel, except for the parking lot and trailhead adjacent to Route 191; add additional acres in the northern parcel adjacent to the Cocoa Mountain Road to include the maritime spruce-fir community type in this area; remove a 512-acre area adjacent to the East Stream Road on the northern parcel for inclusion in the timber management program.
- Monitor existing uses near or within the Ecological Reserves and special sites for potential impacts to the values and resources being protected. This includes activities relating to hiking, camping, ATV trail, the camp lease on the Cocoa Mountain Road, and management of the commercial blueberry barren.
- Conduct further studies and research on the effectiveness and importance of prescribed burns in the grassland areas.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS (see map CC-2)

Wildlife Management as a Dominant Use. Unless otherwise allocated, riparian areas (330' and 75') along brooks and streams are the primary Wildlife Dominant areas on the Cutler Unit. Upland areas adjacent to wetlands are considered riparian areas.

Secondary Uses within Wildlife Dominant areas. Hiking, hunting, fishing, and timber management are allowed secondary uses in Wildlife Dominant areas. There may be seasonal requirements to avoid potential conflicts with wildlife, such as limiting harvesting during critical nesting periods.

Prescribed Burns. The Cutler Unit has a significant fire history dating back to the time of European settlement. The grasslands community requires fire periodically to prevent the invasion of woody plants. Through history, these burns occurred indiscriminately at times to improve deer habitat, or as a result of spring burning of the blueberry barrens. The natural frequency of fires needed to maintain the grasslands is not known but monitoring plots to study the natural succession of the grasslands have been established south of Route 191. It would be desirable to forgo prescribed burns of the coastal parcel, although additional study and research to better understand its importance should be undertaken. Prescribed burning along Route 191 should still be undertaken to minimize impacts from the disposal of cigarette butts and other arson-related problems resulting from highway traffic.

Wildlife Management Recommendations

- Work closely with the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) in monitoring the grassland communities on the Unit.
- Work closely with MNAP and the Forest Protection Division of the Maine Forest Service in conducting/continuing prescribed burns to meet both grassland management goals and to prevent fires.
- Encourage softwood growth on suitable sites.
- Monitor the rocky headlands for seabird nesting activity.
- Look for ways to maintain or enhance early successional habitat that favor hares, bobcat, and other species dependent on this habitat.

RECREATION AREAS (see map CC-3)

Recreation as a Dominant Use. With the exception of the hiking trailhead and parking lot on Route 191 and the motorized trail system on the northern parcel, most of the recreation areas on the Unit are within the Ecological Reserves. These two areas have been designated Developed Class I recreation areas.

Recreation as a Secondary Use. The Ecological Reserve on the coastal parcel is suitable as a Non-mechanized Backcountry Recreation area. Recreational use of the backcountry primarily involves the popular hiking trail system providing access to the coastline, and primitive camping. Hunting, fishing, and trapping are also permitted uses in Backcountry Recreation areas and the Ecological Reserves. A segment of the ATV trail where it passes through the Ecological Reserve on the northern parcel will be allocated as a Developed Class I trail, and will be managed as a secondary use.

Recreation Management Recommendations

- Expand the current trailhead parking area on Route 191 (currently designed for 12 vehicles) to better accommodate the increasing use of the trail system and primitive campsites, and to minimize overflow parking on the highway.
- Monitor hiking and camping use on the coastal portion to address compaction and the proliferation of “social trails.” Look for ways to mitigate this impact.
- Review the current arrangement with the Cobscook Trails Coalition for the general care of the trail system. Look for ways to enhance the overall stewardship of the recreational uses occurring there.
- Monitor recreational uses within the Ecological Reserve on the south parcel, particularly in regards to maintenance issues resulting from the decaying forest environment.
- Look for opportunities to provide additional campsites on coastal portion of the Unit.
- Look for opportunities to provide trails for horseback riding and mountain biking on the north parcel, should there be sufficient interest.
- Monitor recreational use of the ATV trail system on the northern parcel; work with the local ATV club to assist in minimizing impacts to the Ecological Reserve.

Visual Areas. Public use areas, hiking trails, and the ATV trail system on the northern parcel will be managed with respect to the foreground views (Visual Class I) as seen by the visitor to these areas. Background views (Visual Class II) will be managed for where there is site distance along the coastal trail, from the higher elevations on the Cocoa Mountain Road, and from knolls and other high ground areas within the Unit.

TIMBER MANAGEMENT AREAS (see map CC-4)

Timber Management as a Dominant Use. Timber Dominant areas have been allocated on the north section of the Unit. The 288 acres on the southwest portion of the Bold Coast parcel allocated for timber management in 1993 has been redesignated for inclusion within the Ecological Reserve. The 512-acres of previously designated Ecological Reserve on the northern parcel where it abuts the East Steam Road will be managed as Timber Dominant. The wetland area within this portion will continue to receive a high level of protection as before. The combined effect of these changes provide for consolidation and quality enhancements to both the timber acres and the Ecological Reserves on the Unit.

Timber Management as a Secondary Use. Timber management as a secondary use has been allocated only on the north portion of the Unit, and may occur in areas allocated as Wildlife Dominant (riparian zones), Visual Class II (background views seen from the Cocoa Mountain Road), and along the ATV trail where it falls outside of the Ecological Reserve.

Timber Management Recommendations

- Timber management will consist mainly of light removals of low-quality hardwoods and commercial thinnings. Should markets allow, some removal of low quality hardwoods to benefit spruce and fir would be recommended, and some careful thinning of dense softwoods may also be desirable. This latter should favor spruce wherever possible.
- Tipping will be allowed only by Special Use Permit, where the activity does not conflict with other resources or values being managed or protected.